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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAKU 000039

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: DIPLOMATS HARASSED IN NAKHCHIVAN
VILLAGE

REF: A. BAKU 17

[1](#)B. BAKU 27

Classified By: Charge Donald Lu, for reasons 1.4 (b and d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: As detailed in reftel A, on December 28 and January 5, police mistreated hundreds and arrested dozens of residents of Bananyar, a small village in the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhchivan. Poloff and a political LES joined the Norwegian DCM on a fact-finding trip to Nakhchivan on January [1](#)13. While trying to enter Bananyar, the group was verbally and physically harassed by approximately 50 people, and forced to leave the town without speaking to anyone. Through phone calls and meetings with human rights defenders later in the day, the delegation was able to obtain more information about the events in Bananyar. The culturally conservative village has a history of disagreement with the ruling regime. These incidents seem to have been sparked by the town's refusal to obey the regime's orders, both in their religious practice and in their political and economic activity. END SUMMARY.

Mob Harasses Diplomats

[1](#)2. (C) As explained in reftel B, poloff, a political LES, and the Norwegian DCM Lars Hansen entered the village of Bananyar at approximately 11:00 local time. A man stepped in front of the car in which the group was riding and asked it to stop by a small square, where about 50 people were gathered. Poloff introduced herself and explained the purpose of the visit. Without provocation, several men began shouting that everything was fine in the village and nothing had happened there. One began shouting about U.S. financial assistance to Armenia. When the LES tried to clarify the group's purpose, three men grabbed and pushed him. The mob then forced the group towards the car, shouting at the diplomats to leave the village. One man pushed poloff and Norwegian DCM Hansen into the car, saying, "everything is normal here." Several people then pounded on the car, and the driver quickly started the car and exited the village. The beating of the car resulted in the denting of the hood. Several cars followed the vehicle carrying the diplomats, screaming for them to leave when they pulled over outside the village, and again in the next town. Later in the day two different women from the village called the diplomats, while others called local human rights defenders to say that the mob was composed of people from the neighboring village Abraqunus, and they were brought there by the local authorities specifically to stop the

diplomats from entering the town.

Further Detail of Police Brutality in Bananyar

¶3. (C) Poloff and the group later met in the exclave's capital Nakhchivan City with four local human rights defenders, Malahat Nasibova, Ilgar Nasibov, Elman Abbasov, and Vafadar Eyvazov, and spoke to two different women from the town on the telephone, and met with the head of the branch office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nakhchivan. Through these discussions poloff was able to piece together a more detailed picture of what happened in the village, despite not being able to enter the village or meet the residents face to face.

¶4. (C) These representatives told Poloff that Bananyar is a traditional village which has held on to its local culture. Residents practice Islam faithfully, although women do not cover themselves. Due to their strong culture, they have previously resisted some of the Nakhchivan regime's regulations, such as the order to close small shops and tea houses. On December 27 residents of Bananyar, along with two neighboring villages, staged a traditional Ashura mourning ceremony. This ceremony was held without any interruption. (Note: The MFA representative in Nakhchivan stated, however, that such celebrations are not allowed in Azerbaijan and much public education has been done to prevent them. End Note.)

¶5. (C) The human rights activists told Poloff that on the morning of December 28, the morning after the Ashura

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ceremony, local police entered Bananyar and took 8 or 9 men from the village to the police station in the next village. A human rights defender claimed that the local executive authority (ExCom) had made the list of people to be arrested, as some of the arrested had business disagreements with the ExCom, and some had participated in the Ashura ceremony. An eyewitness told the human rights defenders that the men were handcuffed and then tied to a tree by their handcuffs. The son of one of the detained men, Yusif Aliyev, set himself on fire after seeing his father treated in this manner. He is currently being medically treated in Iran.

¶6. (C) Human rights defenders told Poloff that 1,000 villagers then came to the police station to demand the release of the detainees. The police gave into this request, letting the men go without charging them with any crime. Iranian television reported this story, spreading the false rumor that Yusif Aliyev was dead. According to the human rights defenders, this worried residents of the village as well as angered the Nakhchivani authorities.

¶7. (C) The activists further noted that on January 5 the police raided the town again and indiscriminately beat people, including women. They provided additional details, stating: houses were raided and windows broken. Some small shops were destroyed by tractors. Forty people were officially arrested, including nine women who were kept for one night in the police station. Police specifically targeted the local head of the opposition Popular Front Party, Rza Nuriyev, beating and arresting his two sons when they did not find him at home. Nuriyev later turned himself in to free his sons. The human rights defenders say that all 40 people arrested were mistreated at the police station. Several were also taken to the local psychiatric hospital where they were kept. Phone lines were cut for 36 hours, but have now been restored. There also seem to be no uniformed police guarding the town, although women in the town say they are afraid to exit their houses. One woman reported that she was fired from her job as a librarian. Currently, according to several groups of human rights defenders, there are five people still being held in police custody, two people in the psychiatric hospital, and one person is still missing. The human rights defenders believe this second raid was an

attempt to prevent any future demonstrations.

¶18. (C) Interlocutors from human rights defenders to taxi drivers told poloff that Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Viliyat Eyvazov did come from Baku to Nakhchivan to try to resolve the incident. Eyvazov is from Abraqunus and also has relatives in Bananyar. Eyvazov reportedly had an angry meeting with Vasif Talibv, the longtime head of Nakhchivan. Eyvazov was reportedly not satisfied with Talibov's response, and brought the matter to the attention of Ramiz Mehdiyev, head of the Presidential Administration. Given that both women from the village told poloff on the phone that they are still not allowed to leave their homes, this does not seem to have improved conditions for the people of Bananyar.

Embassy Follow-Up

¶19. (C) On January 14 the Embassy sent a diplomatic note to the MFA protesting the treatment of Embassy staff in Nakhchivan. The Embassy also requested meetings for the Charge with the Presidential Administration and the Minister of Internal Affairs. In response to many questions from the press, the Embassy and the Norwegian Embassy issued a joint press statement expressing concern about the situation in Nakhchivan and calling on the government to protect foreign diplomats.

GOAJ Response

¶10. On January 15 the Charge and poloff met with Deputy Foreign Minister Vaqif Sadikov, at his request, regarding the incident. Sadikov defended the GOAJ's position that everything that happened in Bananyar in December and January was in accordance with the law, and that an investigation was

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underway. He asked the Embassy to inform the MFA in Baku in writing well in advance of any travel to Nakhchivan, as the situation there is "very sensitive." He said that such visits do not help to improve bilateral relations, and the USG should focus on larger issues. The Charge agreed to give more advance notice of travel if the security services committed to take every effort to provide security for Embassy staff. The Charge also asked for a more constructive high-level dialogue with the Presidential Administration on the human rights situation in Nakhchivan. The incident was also discussed with FM Mammadyarov in another meeting. (septel)

Comment

¶11. (C) The December 28 and January 5 incidents of police brutality in Bananyar show the complex nature of the political situation in Nakhchivan. In many small villages there is a culture which is conservative in its values and traditional in its religious practice, and this often clashes with the dictates of the ruling regime. In addition, small businessmen find it hard to compete with the ruling elite's monopoly in almost every industry. Local police act with impunity to brutally enforce the regime's absolute control over political, economic and religious life. In addition, authorities in Baku seem to have little control over what happens in Nakhchivan, despite it being the homeland of the President and many other powerful people within the central government. While the mob was harassing diplomats, Nakhchivan strongman Vasif Talibov received a "medal of glory" from President Aliyev for his service to the State.

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